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ABSTRACT

In examining current practices and issues in the accreditation of schools of education, this digest first lists the agencies responsible for accreditation--governmental, professional, and regional. A description is given of the accreditation process in California which includes four procedures that might be applied to any teacher education program. Research, however, shows that standards and evaluation methods differ vastly across state agencies and that national, regional, and state concerns often overlap, producing redundancies. A description of the role and function of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) includes a listing of the representatives of the professional and public policy organizations that comprise it and an explanation of how the NCATE evaluation process works, and of the evaluation criteria used. The Digest concludes with brief comments on the ultimate goals of all accrediting agencies. Resources for further reading are provided. (JD)

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CLEARINGHOUSE ON TEACHER EDUCATION

ERIC DIGEST 7

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Accreditation

Accreditation, the process of evaluating schools, colleges, and education departments, ensures quality control in the teaching profession. This process is closely linked with certification, the procedure of evaluating teacher candidates in subject area, educational methodology, teaching skills, and potential classroom management ability. A separate *ERIC Digest* discusses certification, while an explanation of accreditation purposes and procedures follows.

Agencies Monitoring Teacher Education

In teacher education, national and regional accreditation, as well as state program approval verify that an institution, an education department, or a teacher preparation program has conformed to specific quality standards set by the approval or accrediting agency. Government and professional agencies set these standards and monitor teacher education. Most state departments of education set requirements for program approval to be met by teacher education institutions so that their graduates can qualify for state certification. Six regional accreditation agencies examine institutions for the quality and completeness of all resources and programs. These are Middle States, New England, North Central, Northwest, Southern, and Western Associations of Schools and Colleges. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) provides the only national teacher education accreditation recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA) (Emans 1986). Regional and national accreditation are voluntary processes whereby the institution or department submits its programs and resources for review by the accrediting agency. Prior to consideration for national accreditation, the institution must have regional accreditation and, if available, state approval of its teacher education program.

Teacher Education Monitoring Process

Bernhardt (1984) details the California approval and accreditation process, which includes four procedures that might be applied to any teacher education program. In order to gain state approval, California institutions offering teacher education programs must undergo three evaluation procedures.

The institution must first be granted the right to offer degree programs. Private institutions apply to the Office of Private Postsecondary Education (OPPE, a division of the state department of education) and state schools apply to their respective state university systems. New degree approval takes about a year.

The institutions then undergo an examination by the regional accreditation agency, which is the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) in California. This procedure takes six years and involves an examination of all degree programs, faculty, institutional resources, management and financial stability. The process begins with an institution's application for recognition and submission of a self-evaluation regarding compliance with WASC requirements. The process ends with the recommendation to accredit fully, conditionally, or not to accredit based on an on-site report compiled by a visiting evaluation team.

After approval by WASC, institutions submit teacher education programs to the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC). This state-mandated approval procedure monitors legislated standards and regulations in California's 700 teacher education programs. Again, on-site evaluations occur and procedure completion takes several years.

Finally, the teacher education department can apply to NCATE for national accreditation. Of approximately 1300 institutions offering teacher education, more than 550 institutions have NCATE accredited programs. These institutions produce about eighty percent of the annual new teacher supply (Emans 1986). Most states require that teachers graduate from state and/or regionally accredited schools, while some accept NCATE accreditation for state approval.

Recent studies of accreditation agencies and procedures show that approval and accreditation standards and evaluation methods vastly differ across state agencies and that national, regional, and state concerns often overlap, resulting in redundant procedures (Bernhardt 1984). National accreditation has been proposed to provide consistent nationwide accreditation standards and procedures. A detailed description of NCATE may further the understanding of current teacher education accreditation issues.

What is NCATE?

NCATE accredits any "unit" of an institution of higher education which prepares students to teach, be it "college," "school," or "department." "NCATE Redesign" (1985) presents a comprehensive plan to further the agency's goals of recognizing and encouraging high quality teacher education programs which graduate competent teachers. NCATE comprises representatives of professional and public policy organizations directly involved in the quality of teacher education programs. American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education and the National Education Association (NEA) each account for a quarter of the Council. Educational policy members include National Association of State Boards of Education, Council of Chief State School Officers, National School Boards Association, American Association of School Administrators, Association for Educational Communications and Technology, and Council for Exceptional Children. The membership also includes educational specialty organizations: American Association of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance; National Association of School Psychologists; Council of Teachers of Mathematics; American Association for Counseling and Development; Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development; Association of Teacher Educators; International Reading Association; National Association for the Education of Young Children; National Science Teachers Association; and NEA's Student Programs division. Members contribute to the accreditation process by selecting representatives to serve on the NCATE and the Review Panel Boards.

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How Does the Accreditation Process Work?

The evaluation process begins when an institution applies for accreditation of its teacher education units by filing an application and a declaration of accreditation eligibility with NCATE. The guidelines and format, supplied by NCATE, include eleven preconditions which the institution must meet prior to consideration. The applicant performs a self-evaluation and submits the report to the Board of Examiners. An on-site review team of five or six Board members interviews the unit to verify self-evaluation statements. All facilities are reviewed according to a prescribed three-day procedure, ending with a formal oral report to the unit under study. The team then submits a written report to the Unit Accreditation Board. The applicant unit may also file supplementary materials for consideration by the Board. The Unit Accreditation Board then votes on the accreditation decision. If an adverse decision for accreditation occurs, the unit can appeal to the Review Panel. The process often takes nearly two years to complete.

The criteria NCATE uses to evaluate teacher education facilities has been revised recently (1985) and apply to teacher education programs from five perspectives: (1) professional education knowledge base, (2) relationship to educational practice, (3) students, (4) faculty, and (5) governance and resources. In order to apply identical criteria uniformly to all programs, regardless of size or content, the evaluation standards are written in general terminology. The following description provides a brief summary of standards used in the evaluation for accreditation.

1. In examining the professional education knowledge base, NCATE requires the unit to demonstrate that course content is research-based and directly related to educational practice.
2. In order to meet the standards for the relationship of the teacher education program to the world of practice, the unit must demonstrate that: course curricula are integrated with a wide range of field experience; student teaching includes no less than ten weeks of full-time, direct teaching; the unit maintains communication with its graduates; and cooperation exists with state, district, and local school agencies to assist in program and staff development.
3. The standards for students include evidence of affirmative action and background diversity in the student population, basic skills proficiency in entering undergraduate students, a 2.5 GPA for bachelor's degree candidates, and preconditions for graduate student acceptance.
4. Standards for faculty include degree status recommendations, demonstrated research activity, and limited instructional load of twelve and nine credit hours for undergraduate and graduate faculty respectively.
5. Governance requirements provide a check for formal organization within the unit and teacher preparation programs. Resource specifications require the unit to provide adequate classroom, laboratory and library facilities commensurate with the requirements of a quality education program.

NCATE requirements are sometimes similar to those required by state and regional accreditation agencies. State agencies are often more quantity-specific regarding the breakdown of teacher preparation programs, requiring minimum credit hours to be earned in particular content areas. Individual institutions determine exact course content and distribution of required credit hours over the state minimum.

What are the Goals of Accreditation Agencies?

Ideally, accreditation agencies operate in conjunction with their accredited institutions to assure program quality and continuing development. Jung (1986) suggests that accreditation agencies might also assume the responsibility to stimulate program improvement within institutions evaluated. The national scope of these functions has become increasingly important with the rise of public concern for teaching quality. Although state approval programs attempt to monitor program quality, the diversity of state, regional, and national agencies and the differences in criteria and procedure provide confusing information to institutions of higher education, state education agencies and political education policy makers. Recent implementation of NCATE's reorganization as well as restructuring of many state agencies should contribute toward the consistency of accreditation agency standards and reduction of duplicative monitoring.

References

Many of the following references—those identified with an EJ or ED number—have been abstracted and are in the ERIC data base. The journal articles should be available at most research libraries. The documents (citations with an ED number) are available on microfiche in ERIC microfiche collections at over 700 locations. Documents can also be ordered through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service. Call (800) 227-3742 for price and order information. For a list of ERIC collections in your area, or for information on submitting documents to ERIC, contact the ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education, One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 610, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 293-2450.

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